



Uintah Highlands Prescribed Burn Ogden Ranger District, Wasatch-Cache National Forest 2007

Project Description: This prescribed burn was conducted on the Ogden Ranger District, Wasatch-Cache National Forest, just above the city of Uintah, near the mouth of Weber Canyon in Northern Utah. The burn was conducted in oakbrush vegetation (predominantly Gambel oak and bigtooth maple) in order to reduce hazardous fuels, and create a diversity of age classes within the oakbrush, which has three benefits. It provides modified fuel patterns for more effective, timely, and safe suppression efforts for future wildfires, provides more palatable wildlife browse, and increases seral stage diversity (potentially improving the fire regime condition class). Prescribed burning under relatively cool conditions also reduces the risk of a more severe wildfire, which would affect the community watershed and is much more likely to produce highly increased erosion and mass wasting potential.

This project involved using hand tools to construct a fire line on the lower edge of the burn unit, then hand lighting using drip torches. The burn was planned and implemented with close involvement of the Uintah Highlands community, who had recently completed a community wildfire protection plan with Utah Department of Natural Resources and the Weber County Fire Warden. The community fire plan identified adjacent national forest land as desirable for fuels treatment. The community has improved defensible space around many residences by cutting and chipping oakbrush adjacent to the houses, with assistance from the state. Implementation of this burn involved Weber County testing a reverse 911 phone systems, where adjacent residents were notified by an automatic calling system about prescribed burn plans. Also as part of the reverse 911 test, two Boy Scout projects identified residents that might need evacuation assistance. Local (Layton City and Weber County) fire department engines were partners in implementation of the burn, providing holding resources, along with Uinta National Forest and BLM assistance.

Accomplishment: The NEPA decision memo was signed in January 2006, using category #10 for categorical exclusions, as authorized through the Healthy Forest Initiative. Hand line was constructed in early spring 2006, using a state crew. The prescribed burn was accomplished March 14-16, 2007, with hand ignition occurring on March 14 and 15, and monitoring continuing through March 16. The prescribed burn was highly successful, with no injuries or escaped fire events. Fire spread within the burn unit, eventually blackening about 290 acres of the approximately 400-acre burn unit. This met the stated project objective of burning 40-60% of the oakbrush within the unit. The affected area was determined to be about 639 acres.

Smoke management is always an issue in burns along the Wasatch Front such as this. During the main burning period, smoke dispersed away from the residential areas, as planned. The fire continued burning overnight, which was unexpected for this time of year, and smoke settled on residential areas, causing a few complaints, primarily on the first night. However, most residents expressed support for the implementation of this burn. Immediate post-burn monitored showed desired Gambel oak top-kill was achieved, fine fuels appear to have been reduced, and soil cover maintained at desirable levels.

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The Uintah Highlands Prescribed Burn was conducted near numerous residences. The burn unit went up the hill to the snow line, one advantage of an early spring burn.